

The Polls: Terrorism and Hijacking

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THE public is deeply concerned over the increase in the frequency of acts of violence involving the holding of hostages and other terrorism. Late in 1977, 90 percent of the population of the United States considered terrorism a very serious problem, and according to an opinion survey conducted half a year later in Great Britain, 85 percent of the British population hold the same view. Regarding terrorism in their own country, and this applies specifically to Great Britain, fewer people consider terrorism to be a very serious problem (Harris, SOC).

The farther from home the acts of violence take place, the less sure people are whether the perpetrators are to be seen as terrorists or freedom fighters. In Great Britain, the IRA are regarded as terrorists by 92 percent; the PLO by 70 percent, and the people opposing Mr. Smith in Rhodesia by 34 percent. The "Don't know" percentage rises from 6 percent for the IRA to 21 percent for the PLO, and to 29 percent for the people opposing Mr. Smith (SOC, Dec. 1977).

Harris and Social Surveys put before the public a list of statements on causes of terrorism asking respondents to indicate whether they felt each statement referred to a major, a minor, or hardly a cause of terrorism. A marked feature of the results is that the "Not sure/Don't know" percentages are much higher in Great Britain than they are in the United States. Furthermore, almost every statement is seen as a major cause of terrorism by a fairly high percentage of the population.

The list of statements on possible solutions of terrorism also finds wide approval among the public. Either Harris and SOC have not included extreme views in the list of statements, or people are prepared to endorse any possible solution to terrorism, even if they would not normally approve of the method employed. The latter explanation is supported by the results of other opinion surveys: Introduction of the death penalty for terrorists is favored by a majority of 55 percent in Germany (DMS, 1976), 55 percent in the United States (Harris, 1977), and 71 percent in Great Britain (SOC, 1978). In the Netherlands, 62 percent are in favor of placing South Moluccans under strict surveillance, even if the country should

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somewhat resemble a police state in that case; 73 percent of the Dutch want especially vigorous action taken against terrorists, and 44 percent feel the terrorists are not entitled to the same rights as other arrested suspects.

In Germany, several opinion surveys indicate the willingness of people to sacrifice their personal rights and liberties and to accept a strengthened influence of the state and the police if this can serve the purpose of combating terrorism (DMS). An ample majority of the German people (77 percent) are in agreement with the news embargo that was instituted by the government a few days after Schleyer was kidnapped by the RAF. They approve because the publicity aimed for by the terrorists is thus withheld from them, and also because it enables the politicians to decide freely without continuously having to justify their decisions (DMS, 1977).

The opinion survey conducted early 1978 in Germany (DMS, Jan. 1978) also reveals that the battle against terrorists can have serious consequences for civil liberties: 21 percent, or 1 out of 5 Germans, feel that "one nowadays has to be careful with what one says in the Federal Republic; one always has to be afraid of being misunderstood and of being at once suspected of sympathizing with the terrorists." And a sympathizer, according to 18 percent of the German population, is a person who does not wish the death penalty introduced for the terrorists, or, according to 56 percent, a person who feels compassion for the terrorists because he believes them to commit their crimes out of despair only.

The following research institutes have given us permission to publish the results of their surveys, for which we here express our sincere thanks and indebtedness.

AIPO—American Institute for Public Opinion, USA

DMS—Institut für Demoskopie, West Germany

EMNID—Emnid Institut GmbH & Co., West Germany

Harris—The Harris Survey, USA

NIPO—Nederlands Instituut voor de Publieke Opinie, Netherlands

REOP—Instituto de la Opinion Publica, Spain

SOC—Social Surveys Ltd., Great Britain

Texas Poll—The Texas Poll, USA

The dates given with the tables are the publication dates of the research results. Where a date is marked with an asterisk, several breakdowns are given in the corresponding publication which have not been included in the present article. The surveys are based on nation- or statewide representative samples of adults. For more information or additional breakdowns, contact The Polls Archives, Weteringschans 100-102, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

Terrorism—A Serious Problem

USA—Harris (Dec. 1977)/Great Britain—SOC (June 1978): *How serious a problem do you feel terrorism is in the world, where terrorists kidnap businessmen, hijack planes and commit other violence—very serious, only somewhat serious, or hardly serious at all?*

	USA	Great Britain
Very serious	90%	85%
Only somewhat serious	9	12
Hardly serious at all	1	2
Not sure/Don't know	—	1

How serious do you feel terrorism is here in (own country)—very serious, only somewhat serious, or hardly serious at all?

	USA	Great Britain
Very serious	60%	30%
Only somewhat serious	31	40
Hardly serious at all	7	27
Not sure/Don't know	2	3

West Germany—EMNID: *What do you consider the most important public event of the year 1977? [Open answers, Jan. 1978*]*

	Total
Terrorism, kidnappings, suicides of terrorists	59%
Peace efforts, Israel-Egypt	15
Peace efforts generally	3
Birth/death of famous personalities	1
Other answers	5
No answer	17

Terrorist—Criminals or Freedom Fighters?

Great Britain—SOC: *People who are called terrorists by some people may be seen as freedom fighters by others. What is your view of people who commit acts of violence against civilian populations? (Dec. 1977)*

	Terrorists	Freedom Fighters	Don't Know
First, would you say the IRA are terrorists or freedom fighters?	92%	3%	6%
And what about the PLO, the Palestine Liberation Organization?	70	9	21
And the people opposing Mr. Smith in Rhodesia?	34	37	29

People who are called terrorists by some people may be seen as freedom fighters by others. What is your view of these people who commit acts of violence against civilian populations? Are they always justified in what they do, sometimes justified, or never justified? (Jan. 1978)

Always justified	2%
Sometimes justified	16
Never justified	77
Don't know	5

Spain—REOP: *Would you say that hijacking should always be regarded as a common crime, or that its criminal character can be predominated by political implications? (Oct/Dec 1972*)*

Should always be considered a common crime	32%
Political implications can predominate	60
No answer	8

Causes of Terrorism

USA—Harris (Dec. 1977); Great Britain—SOC (June 1978):

	Major	Minor	Hardly	Not Sure! Don't Know
<i>Acts of terrorism receive so much coverage in the news that this encourages terrorists to further acts of terror.</i>				
USA	78%	12%	3%	7%
Great Britain	60	20	10	10
<i>Terrorism is growing in the world because the countries of the world have been too soft in dealing with terrorists.</i>				
USA	76	12	4	8
Great Britain	75	10	7	8
<i>Terrorism has always been the weapon used by radicals who feel the system is totally unjust.</i>				
USA	70	15	5	10
Great Britain	44	22	10	24
<i>As in Germany, young radicals feel their cause can only achieve attention by committing acts of violence.</i>				
USA	68	16	5	11
Great Britain	48	20	11	21
<i>Racial and religious minorities feel their cause can only be brought to attention through terror acts.</i>				
USA	54	22	12	12
Great Britain	42	25	16	17
<i>A modern, complex industrial society makes it easy for a small number of terrorists to commit major acts of violence.</i>				
USA	49	25	12	14
Great Britain	34	22	15	29
<i>Professional terrorists are trained by Palestinian Arabs in Lebanon.</i>				
USA	40	18	11	31
Great Britain	39	15	12	34
<i>Professional terrorists are trained by President Khadafy of Lybia.</i>				
USA	27	18	11	44
Great Britain	18	14	15	53

Spain—REOP: *You may have heard that a number of acts of terrorism have been perpetrated all over the world. What do you believe to be the cause of these actions?* (Oct./Dec. 1972*)

Eagerness to receive attention on the part of those who commit them	18%
It is a way to defend their rights	17
It is a form of crime which is typical of our time	39
It is the only way of fighting that is open to them	14
Others	4
No answer	7

Solution and Prevention of Terrorism

USA—Texas Poll: *What do you personally feel should be done to prevent the hijacking of airplanes?* (Nov. 1970)

Put guards on planes	40%
Search all passengers	25
Use detection devices	14
Check all baggage	5
Screen passengers	5
Seal off pilots	2
Provide severe penalties	14
Extradite hijackers	4
Other replies	10
Undecided	21

(multiple answers)

USA—Harris (Dec. 1977)/Great Britain—SOC (June 1978): *Now let me ask you about some solutions that have been proposed as ways of dealing with terrorism. For each, tell me if you favor or oppose that solution.*

	Favor	Oppose	Not Sure
<i>Every country should develop special teams of commandos who are experts at capturing terrorists while saving the lives of hostages.</i>			
USA	89%	5%	6%
Great Britain	85	5	10
<i>All airline service should be cut off to and from any country which allows terrorists to use that country as a base of training or operations, or which gives refuge to terrorists or lets them go free.</i>			
USA	79	11	10
Great Britain	67	20	13
<i>A special world force should be organized which would operate in any country of the world and which would investigate terrorist groups, arrest them, and put their leaders and members to death.</i>			
USA	55	29	16
Great Britain	66	19	15
<i>All those caught committing acts of terror should be convicted and given the death penalty.</i>			
USA	55	31	14
Great Britain	71	15	14
<i>Countries should refuse to make any concessions to terrorists, such as paying ransoms or freeing other terrorists from prison, even if this means people who are kidnapped or held hostage end up being killed by the terrorists.</i>			
USA	51	31	18
Great Britain	65	18	17

Spain—REOP: *Which of the methods I am going to read to you would constitute, in your opinion, the most effective means towards avoiding hijackings and captures?* (Oct./Dec. 1972*)

Never give in to the demands of the captors	18%
Study the case thoroughly and make concessions so as to prevent worse	23
Respond with the same violence	3
Present the problems of the hijackers to the UN, so that their case may be heard	12
Isolate the country that shelters, protects, or aids them	11
Met out exemplary punishment to the captors	25
Others	2
No answer	5

West Germany—DMS: *Do you fundamentally favor or oppose the introduction of the death penalty for terrorists?* (Aug. 1976)

<i>Favor</i>	<i>Oppose</i>	<i>Undecided</i>
55%	29%	16%

Great Britain—SOC: *Do you think that aircraft hijackers should or should not be surrendered to the countries from which they hijack planes?*

	<i>May 1973</i>	<i>Nov. 1977</i>
Should	74%	81%
Should not	9	8
Don't know	17	11

Some countries refuse to hand over hijackers. Do you think that all other countries should stop all air communications with such countries or not?

	<i>May 1973</i>	<i>Nov. 1977</i>
Should	43%	47%
Should not	29	33
Don't know	28	20

Side Effects of the Battle Against Terrorists

Spain—REOP: *As you know, there has been an attempted kidnaping with victims at the Olympic Games. Who do you believe is principally responsible for these events?* (Oct./Dec. 1972*)

The Munich police who attempted a surprise attack and fired first	12%
The Palestinian terrorists who took the Israeli athletes hostage	42
The Israeli athletes in trying to defend themselves and fighting their aggressors	3
The State of Israel for refusing to negotiate	15
Deficiency of the security system at the Munich olympics	14
Other	3
No answer	11

When comparing the events at Munich and the reprisals taken by the State of Israel against communities of Palestinian refugees, which has made the deeper impression upon you? (Oct./Dec. 1972*)

The Munich massacre	52%
The reprisals of the State of Israel	39
No answer	10

Netherlands—NIPO: *Do you believe the South Moluccans should be placed under strict surveillance, even though our country might then somewhat resemble a police state?* (July 1977)

In favor of strict surveillance	62%
Opposed to strict surveillance	33
No opinion	5

Do you feel that terrorists such as hijackers of trains and members of the German Baader-Meinhof group should have the same rights as other arrested suspects in our country, or do you believe they are not entitled to such rights? (Oct. 1977)*

	Same Rights as Other Suspects	Cannot Claim Equal Rights	No Answer
All	49%	44%	7%
Women	48	43	9
Men	50	46	4

Do you think that extra stern and harsh action should be taken against such terrorists, or should they be dealt with in the same manner as other criminals?

	Extra Stern, Harsh Action	Same as Other Criminals	No Answer
All	73%	21%	6%
Women	72	20	8
Men	73	23	4

West Germany—DMS: The trial at Stammheim of the terrorists Baader, Ensslin, and Raspe was recently completed. What is your impression: Do you feel it was generally a fair trial, that is, did the prisoners and their lawyers have every opportunity for a proper defense, or were they hindered in any way? (May 1977)

Fair trial	60%
Defense obstructed	10
Impossible to say	30

If the influence of the state and the police has to be strengthened in order to combat terrorism, would you go along with limitations of your personal rights by such measures as surveillance and house searches, or would you reject this?

	Feb. 1978*							
	May 1975 All	All	Men	Women	16-29 Years	30-44 Years	45-59 Years	60 and Over
Would accept	69	62	60	64	51	67	63	67
Would reject	21	26	30	22	36	23	25	19
Undecided, no opinion	10	12	10	14	13	10	12	14

In the discussion of effective ways of fighting terrorism, the question is raised whether the conversations between the accused and their lawyers should be supervised. Some are against supervision because they feel it is part of a fair trial to enable a prisoner to talk confidentially with his lawyer. Others are for supervising conversations with the defense as they feel this is the best way of preventing new acts of terrorism from being organized in and from the prison. How do you feel about this? (May 1977)

For supervision of the defense	64%
Against supervision	22
Undecided	14

West Germany—EMNID: *After the suicides of terrorists in several penitentiaries, it is being considered to have the cells of the terrorists constantly watched. Some people are in favor of this measure in order to prevent further suicides, others oppose it because it would offend human dignity. Which of these views comes closest to your own feeling?* (Nov./Dec. 1977*)

	Total	Age				65 and Over
		14-19	20-29	30-49	50-64	
Keep under constant observation so as to prevent further suicides	54%	46%	51%	53%	59%	57%
No constant observation, as it offends human dignity	44	51	45	45	39	40
No answer	3	3	4	2	2	4

The Role of the News Media

USA—AIPO: *Some people say the news media place too much emphasis on the reporting of terrorism such as kidnappings, the holding of hostages, and the like. Others say that such reporting is necessary to keep people fully informed. Which point of view comes closest to your own opinion on this issue?* (April 1977*)

	Terrorism Is Overemphasized	Public Should Be Made Aware	No Opinion
National	47%	50%	3%
Men	51	46	3
Women	43	54	3
Whites	50	48	2
Nonwhites	24	67	9
Under 30	37	61	2
30-49	55	42	3
50 and over	48	48	4

Do you think news media coverage of terrorism encourages others to commit these acts, or not? (April 1977*)

	Yes	No	No Opinion
National	64%	27%	9%
College	71	21	8
High school	65	28	7
Grade school	52	33	15

West Germany—DMS: *A few days after Schleyer was kidnapped, the Federal Government imposed a news embargo. Very generally speaking, do you agree or disagree with this news embargo?* (Sept. 1977)

Agree	77%
Disagree	13
Undecided, no answer	10

Sympathizers

West Germany—DMS: *Some people say that one has to be careful nowadays in the Federal Republic with what one says; one always has to be afraid of being misunderstood and of being at once suspected of sympathizing with the terrorists. Do you think that is correct, or wouldn't you say so? (Jan. 1978*)*

Disagree	67%
Is correct	21
Undecided	12

Do you believe the sympathizers come from all ranks of society, or are there certain ranks or circles which are close to the terrorists? (Jan. 1978)*

From all ranks of population	47%
Certain ranks of circles	43
Don't know	10

What are the circles you believe the sympathizers mainly come from; that is, where do the terrorists especially find their aiders and abettors? Could you tell me on the basis of this list? (Only asked when the answer to the previous question was "certain ranks or circles." Jan. 1978)*

Students	38%
Lawyers	32
Communists	23
College professors	18
Authors	12
Rightist radicals, former Nazis	10
Young Socialists	9
Teachers	8
Artists, actors	7
Journalists	7
Certain groups in the Socialist Party	6
Labor unions	2
Certain groups in the Liberal Party	2
Nobody from these circles	1

(multiple answers)

In the newspapers and on television a great deal is now being said about the so-called sympathetic environment of the terrorists, but the question is who should be counted among the sympathizers and who shouldn't. Let me read a few examples to you. Would you please tell me for each if such a person, in your opinion, is or is not a sympathizer. (Jan. 1978)*

A sympathizer is:

Somebody who gives shelter to a terrorist in his home	95%
Somebody who recognizes a terrorist but doesn't report him to the police	73
Somebody who gives money, like the people who contributed to the dental treatment for Gudrun Ensslin	68
Somebody who makes endeavors toward getting prison conditions for terrorists alleviated	67
A person who feels pity for the terrorists because he believes them to perpetrate these crimes out of sheer despair	56
A person who considers the terrorists' criticism of our society justified in some respects	36
A person who believes the lawyers should have the right at all times to visit the terrorists in prison	29
A person who does not wish the death penalty introduced for terrorists	18
None of these	2

(multiple answers)